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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000914

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AID/BHR/OFDA FOR RTHAYER
MANILA FOR OFDA DOLAN
BANGKOK FOR OFDA ROGERS
DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/PIMBS, CA/OCS/ACS/EAP
GENEVA PLEASE PASS TO OCHA AND IFRC
CINCPAC FOR POLAD
ROME PASS TO FODAG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: OFDA ASSESSMENT: FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES IN
SOUTHWESTERN SRI LANKA

REF: (A) COLOMBO 00826, (B) STATE 133388, (C) STATE 206910

(OFDA 2003 GUIDANCE CABLE), (D) STATE 268806 (SUPPLEMENT TO
OFDA 2003 GUIDANCE CABLE)

1. SUMMARY: USAID/OFDA ASIA REGIONAL ADVISOR TRAVELED TO SRI LANKA FROM MAY 21-25 TO ASSIST THE MISSION WITH RESPONSE TO THE FLOOD DISASTER. SHE TRAVELED WITH USAID/SRI LANKA MISSION DISASTER RELIEF OFFICER (MDRO) TO THE WORST HIT DISTRICTS IN SOUTHWESTERN SRI LANKA. WHILE THE FLOODWATERS HAVE RECEDED IN MANY OF THE AREAS AT HIGHER ELEVATIONS, WATER LEVELS REMAIN HIGH OR HAVE RISEN IN SOME OF THE LOW LYING AREAS. AS ROAD ACCESS TO MOST AREAS IMPROVES, FOOD AND OTHER RELIEF ITEMS ARE BEING DISTRIBUTED TO AFFECTED FAMILIES. CROP DAMAGE AS A RESULT OF THE FLOODS MAY RESULT IN A MID-TERM SHORTFALL IN FOODSTOCKS, PARTICULARLY FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE POPULATIONS. PROVISION OF CLEAN WATER IS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY NEED AT THIS TIME. OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR RECOMMENDS OFDA/WASHINGTON CONSIDER PROVIDING ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO THE FLOODS, FOCUSING ON THE WATER AND SANITATION SECTOR, PENDING RECEIPT AND APPROVAL OF FORTHCOMING PROPOSAL. END SUMMARY.

2. BACKGROUND: PER REF A, HEAVY RAINS HAVE AFFECTED THE WESTERN, SOUTHERN AND SABARAGAMUWA PROVINCES OF SRI LANKA RESULTING IN FLOODING AND LANDSLIDES IN KALUTARA, RATNAPURA, GALLE AND MATARA DISTRICTS. THE UNUSUALLY HEAVY RAINS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THE SEASONAL MONSOON; HOWEVER, THE SITUATION HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY CYCLONIC ACTIVITY IN THE BAY OF BENGAL.

3. USAID/OFDA ASIA REGIONAL ADVISOR MARIZA ROGERS TRAVELED TO COLOMBO MAY 21-25, 2003 TO ASSIST THE USAID MISSION WITH THE FLOOD AND LANDSLIDE DISASTER IN THE SOUTHWESTERN REGION OF SRI LANKA. SHE WAS JOINED BY USAID/SRI LANKA MDRO JESSICA DAVEY FOR COORDINATION MEETINGS IN COLOMBO AND ASSESSMENTS IN THE DISTRICTS OF RATNAPURA, GALLE, MATARA AND KALUTARA IN THREE SOUTHWESTERN PROVINCES OF SRI LANKA.

4. CURRENT SITUATION: THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA (GSL) CRISIS MANAGEMENT CENTER WITHIN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE HAS BEEN COLLECTING AND UPDATING THE FIGURES CONCERNING THIS DISASTER FROM POLICE REPORTS, RELIEF WORKERS AND THE GOVERNMENT AGENTS IN THE AFFECTED DISTRICTS. AS OF MAY 27, 2003, THE GSL REPORTS: 151,141 FAMILIES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED; 250 DEATHS HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED; 24,365 HOUSES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED AND 22,073 HOMES HAVE BEEN PARTIALLY DAMAGED. WHILE FLOOD WATERS REMAIN STANDING IN SOME DISTRICTS, ROAD ACCESS AND THE REQUIRED ROAD CLEARANCE CONTINUE TO BE THE GREATEST OBSTACLES TO DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF IN THOSE AREAS. THE METEOROLOGY DEPARTMENT HAS FORECAST MORE RAIN IN THE AFFECTED AREAS AS PART OF THE SEASONAL MONSOON. METEOROLOGISTS ARE MONITORING THE EXISTING CONDITIONS, FAVOURABLE FOR CYCLONES IN THE BAY OF BENGAL.

5. RESPONSE TO DATE: PER REF B, THE USG PROVIDED IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE THROUGH THE SRI LANKA RED CROSS WITH A GRANT OF US\$50,000 FOR RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR APPROXIMATELY 10,000 PEOPLE. THE SUPPLIES WILL BE PROVIDED TO FAMILIES WHOSE HOMES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED, OR THOSE WHO LOST MOST OF THEIR HOUSEHOLD BELONGINGS AS A RESULT OF THE FLOOD. THE RELIEF ITEMS INCLUDE BED SHEETS, COOKING SETS, SLEEPING MATS, LANTERNS, BUCKETS, SOAP, AND BOTTLED WATER. THESE LOCALLY PROCURED ITEMS ARE CURRENTLY BEING PACKAGED AS KITS BY RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS, AND WILL BE DISTRIBUTED TO THE AFFECTED FAMILIES SHORTLY. IN ADDITION, PART OF THE FUNDS WILL SUPPORT THE CLEANING AND REPAIR OF 100 WATER WELLS IN THE AFFECTED AREAS.

6. AS OF MAY 26, 2003, DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RELIEF EFFORTS AMOUNT TO MORE THAN US\$ 2 MILLION ACCORDING TO

RELIEFWEB (WWW.RELIEFWEB.ORG). DONOR COUNTRIES INCLUDE JAPAN, NORWAY, AUSTRALIA, THE EUROPEAN UNION, CANADA, INDIA AND SWEDEN.

17. RELIEF COORDINATION: THE LEAD MINISTRY FOR COORDINATION OF DISASTER RESPONSE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL IS THE MINISTRY OF POWER AND ENERGY; AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL, THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE HAS ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RESPONSE. AN OPERATIONS CENTER HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, WHERE INFORMATION ON CASUALTIES, DAMAGES AND NEEDS ARE BEING COLLECTED. THE UN AGENCIES INVOLVED IN THE RESPONSE INCLUDE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR), WORLD FOOD PROGRAM (WFP), UNICEF, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO), AND UN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (UNDP). THE UN OFFICE FOR COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (OCHA) HAS FIELDED ASSESSMENT TEAMS AND ALSO PROVIDED UN VOLUNTEERS TO ASSIST WITH COORDINATION OF RELIEF ACTIVITIES AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL. CURRENTLY, THERE ARE NO INTERNATIONAL NGOS WORKING IN THE AFFECTED AREAS, AND ONLY A FEW LOCAL COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS ARE OPERATIONAL.

18. RATNAPURA DISTRICT ASSESSMENT: ON MAY 23, THE TEAM VISITED RATNAPURA DISTRICT AND OBSERVED VARYING DEGREES OF RECOVERY; WITHIN RATNAPURA TOWN THE ELECTRICITY HAD BEEN RESTORED, AND FAMILIES WERE SHOVELING THE MUD AND DEBRIS FROM THEIR HOMES; CLOTHES, FURNITURE AND SCHOOL BOOKS WERE LAID OUT TO DRY ALONGSIDE THE ROADS. HOWEVER, BEYOND THE MUNICIPALITY LIMITS, ROAD CLEARANCE AND REPAIR WAS CONTINUING; MORE HOMES WERE PARTIALLY DAMAGED OR DESTROYED, AND MANY PADDY FIELDS WERE WASHED AWAY. THE TEAM ATTEMPTED TO REACH A VILLAGE WHERE LOCALS REPORTED THAT 40 OUT OF 75 FAMILIES WERE BURIED BY A LANDSLIDE. HOWEVER, THE ROAD WAS TOO HEAVILY DAMAGED AND THE VILLAGE COULD ONLY BE ACCESSED ON FOOT - ANOTHER 5 KILOMETERS WALK. ACCORDING TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, LIMITED RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR THE VILLAGERS HAD BEEN AIRDROPPED BY MILITARY HELICOPTERS. THERE WERE MANY REPORTS OF SUCH ISOLATED AREAS AND SITUATIONS ALL OVER THE DISTRICT.

19. KALUTARA AND GALLE DISTRICTS ASSESMENT: ON MAY 23 AND 24, THE TEAM VISITED KALUTARA AND GALLE DISTRICTS, AND OBSERVED A SIMILAR RETURN TO NORMALCY IN THE LARGER TOWNS. HOWEVER, THE TEAM NOTED THAT STANDING WATER AND RESIDUAL MUD REMAINED IN MORE AREAS OF THESE DISTRICTS. WHILE FLOOD WATERS IN THE HILL AREAS HAVE MOSTLY RECEDED, THE WATER LEVELS IN THE LOWER LYING AREAS HAVE RISEN. THE EXISTING BUNDS IN THESE DISTRICTS HAVE BUFFERED SOME HOMES FROM THE EFFECTS OF THE FLOOD, BUT APPEAR TO HAVE WORSENERED THE IMPACT IN OTHER AREAS. IN EACH OF THE DISTRICTS, THE TEAM SPOKE WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SRI LANKA RED CROSS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENTS, AND THOSE DISPLACED FAMILIES, NOW EVACUATED TO SCHOOLS, TEMPLES AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

110. NEEDS: ACCORDING TO THE UN, THE RED CROSS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, FOOD IS NOT AN URGENT REQUIREMENT AT THIS TIME. IN ADDITION TO PREPARED FOOD AND DRY RATIONS PROVIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESSES, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC, WFP HAS DIVERTED SOME OF ITS FOODSTOCKS TO THE FLOOD-AFFECTED AREAS. FLOOD-RELATED CROP DAMAGE MAY RESULT IN SOME MID-TERM SHORTFALL IN FOODSTOCKS, PARTICULARLY FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE POPULATIONS; THE FOOD SECURITY SITUATION MAY REQUIRE MONITORING. NON-FOOD RELIEF ITEMS ARE BEING PROVIDED THROUGH GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR DONATIONS, WHILE THE UN HAS PROVIDED ITEMS FROM ITS OWN STOCKPILE.

111. PROVISION OF CLEAN WATER IS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY AT THIS TIME. MOST OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNAL WELLS REMAIN FLOODED. IN THE AREAS WHERE THE WATER HAS RECEDED, THE WELLS HAVE SUSTAINED STRUCTURAL DAMAGE, AND THE WATER IS CONTAMINATED BY SEDIMENT AND DEBRIS. DRINKING WATER IS BEING DELIVERED BY LORRY AND TRACTOR MOUNTED BOWSERS TO AREAS ALONG AND NEAR THE MAJOR ROADS; OUTLYING AREAS ARE DEPENDENT UPON DISTRIBUTION OF BOTTLED WATER. WHILE THERE IS CONCERN ABOUT WATER-BORNE DISEASES, THERE ARE NO CONCLUSIVE REPORTS OF INCREASED INCIDENCE.

112. RECOMMENDATION: THE EMERGENCY PROVISION OF CLEAN WATER IS NEEDED TO PROTECT THE HEALTH STATUS OF PEOPLE IN THE FLOOD-AFFECTED AREAS. OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR RECOMMENDS THAT OFDA/WASHINGTON CONSIDER PROVIDING ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO THE FLOODS, FOCUSING ON THE WATER AND SANITATION SECTOR, PENDING RECEIPT AND APPROVAL OF FORTHCOMING PROPOSAL.

WILLS